1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

bodies were thrown on the flaming byres and huts. Captives were placed in the centre of the camp, the women being sometimes bound at night to render them more secure. Sexual intercourse is taboo on a raid. Nor may Nuer eat with a captive. A boy captive may not even draw water for them to drink. Only when

Tribal Distribution about 1860 (after V. A. Malte-Brun, *Nouvelles annales des voyages*, 1863).

an ox has been sacrificed in honour of the ghosts, after the return home, and they have been informed that strangers have entered their homesteads, may Nuer have sexual relations with captives or eat with them.

In the following section we describe other foreign contacts, but till European conquest the only foreign relations which may be said to have been expressed in constant warfare were those with the various Dinka tribes which border Nuerland.

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

bably always been the same number of sets in existence at any time and these sets always have the same relative positions to each other in the system, regardless of actual groups of men composing them.

It is significant that among the Nuer, as among other East African peoples, the age-set system is the first institution to undergo rapid and great modification under European rule and that the other social systems do not appear to be affected by the changes in its constitution. This tends to confirm the opinion we have earlier expressed, that whilst the age-set system is combined with the territorial and lineage systems in the same social cadre and is consistent with them, the consistency is not an interdependence.

IV

Within the age-set system the position of every male Nuer is structurally defined in relation to every other male Nuer and his status to them is one of seniority, equality, or juniority. It is difficult to describe these statuses in terms of behaviour, because the attitudes they impose are often of a very general nature. The following points may, however, be noted. (1) There are certain ritual observances and avoidances, chiefly between members of the same set, but also between sets. The most important of these are the segregation of the sets at sacrificial feasts, to which we have referred, and the stringent prohibition on members of a set burying an age-mate or partaking of the meat of beasts sacrificed at his mortuary ceremony; but there are a number of other ritual injunctions. (2) A man may not marry, or have sexual relations with, the daughter of an age-mate, for she is his 'daughter' and he is her 'father'. Also, while a man may always have sexual relations with the daughter of one of his father's age-mates he ought not to marry her unless either his father, or her father, is dead, and then only after the parties to the marriage have exchanged beasts in atonement to the age-set of the fathers. (3) Members of the same age-set are on terms of entire equality. A man does not stand on ceremony with his age-mates, but jokes, plays, and eats with them at his ease. Age-mates associate in work, war, and in all the pursuits of leisure. They are expected to offer one

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

a man would chant if there were no girls near, a Nuer replied: 'And if there were no girls near, what would he chant for?' A youth who wants a girl in marriage goes to her village or camp in the evening and chants there for an hour or two. He knows that she will understand that the poem is about herself. Her relatives know why he has come. 534

A youth is particularly careful not to be seen eating by unrelated girls: 'If he is not making love to them, he may do so some time or to one of their relatives.' When I asked whether it would matter if your sisters saw you eating, the reply was, 'Do you make love to your sisters?' Food must never be mentioned in the presence of girls, and a man will endure severe hunger rather than let them know that he has not eaten for a long time. It is a strict rule of Nuer society that the sexes, unless they are close kin, avoid each other in the matter of food. Nuer do not go near persons of the other sex when they are eating. A man may mention food but not sexual matters before kinswomen, and he may mention sexual matters but not food before unrelated girls. 264 834

Girls are the arbiters of decorum, and the severest sanction of a breach of good form is their disapproval. Not only is the shame of it a sanction for etiquette, but it is a powerful influence in making a youth generous, respectful to his elders, dutiful to his parents and kinsmen, hospitable to guests, industrious, and brave. The girls on their side are anxious to earn the good opinion of youths by correct behaviour in the home and in society. 562 576 584

It will have been observed that it rests entirely with a girl whether she accepts a man's attentions and how far he presses his advances. A girl who is fond of a youth wants him to marry her. If he is philandering she will, if she has any regard for her chastity, be frugal with her favours. The talk between a youth and his sweetheart is frequently the topic of marriage. He asks her whether she will marry him, and she says that she will if he has cattle and her parents consent; or he entreats her to allow intimacy, and she urges that she might become pregnant and he not marry her, and she would then be in trouble. However, if a girl is in love with a youth, and he has a winning manner, she may surrender to his pleading. Men often break the promises they make to girls when they want favours from them, and in looking for a wife a man may pass over all his sweethearts, past and present, and go with his friends to seek a spouse outside the circle of his usual acquaintances. 584 836

7: Evans-Pritchard E-6 (1931-1936) 1949 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

835 avoided easily and without expense by cutting in twain, in the place of an animal sacrifice, a *kwel*, a wild, yellow, tomato-like fruit found in abundance near habitations. It is only if the paternal uncle is the father's uterine brother or if his family forms a common household with that of the father that relations with his wife are regarded in a more serious light. They may bring on the offenders serious misfortunes.

The uterine brother is a brother *kwi mas*, on the mother's side, and relations with his wife reflect the disgust Nuer feel at any association of sex with the mother. They regard relations with wives of relatives of the mother's side with distaste 'because of the mother'. The uterine paternal uncle partakes in a lesser degree of the same maternal associations because he is a son of the father's mother. But the paternal half-uncles, the paternal half-brothers, and the paternal cousins are 'bulls', and *Tut thilke ruai*, 'There is no incest among bulls.' If they live in different villages from that of the adulterer some compensation in cattle might be exacted, but if they live in the same village it will not be asked for: 'There would be no compensation, for they are of the same community (*cieng*).' Nuer say, however, that adultery with the wife of a paternal half-uncle is wrong 'because of the father', which means because the half-uncle should be treated on the pattern of the father. To have relations with his wife is not incestuous, but shows lack of respect. Relations with the wives of paternal half-brothers and paternal cousins are not subject to the same restraint. It is not *ruai* to have relations with the wife of an age-mate, but it is regarded as a grave breach of confidence, for a man will trust his wife to the honour of an age-mate, and it is believed that the guardian-spirit of the age-set will punish the offender.

[834] [561]

835 587 It is forbidden on incestuous grounds to have relations with the wives of kinsmen, other than those mentioned, but only during their lifetime, when they are themselves cohabiting with their wives. It is permissible, indeed to some extent obligatory, to take the place of the husbands in leviratic marriage. It is usual for a widow to cohabit with her dead husband's brother, for preference with his uterine brother. Sometimes the son takes her and occasionally the sister's son. If a man thus cohabits with his father's, uterine brother's, or maternal uncle's widow, he first breaks off the physical relationship between the widow and her late spouse by sacrificing a sheep. Nuer says: 'He

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

are brewed and a bullock or sheep is killed. It seems that they do not always kill an animal but they must do so when it is an eldest son who is being initiated or a boy whose eldest brother has died. Members of the father's age-set eat the meat at night and they alone. During the night they sing songs amid the cattle. On the following day, in the afternoon, they drink beer and leap about behind the bullocks and there is a lot of horseplay. The women-folk seize the penises of members of their husbands' age-set, the father of an initiated boy especially being subject to this treatment. They tie cord to the penises of the men and pull them while the men retaliate by tugging at the skin aprons of the wives of their age-mates. A man of the age-set of the father of an initiate will lift up the apron of his wife (the boy's mother) and will utter a ceremonial cry into her vagina. This man is generally the woman's *cuarda*, that is to say a paternal cousin of her husband. Only members of the father's age-set and their wives will partake in this horseplay in the homestead of the father of the initiate. Thus if the boy is the son of a *maker* all members of the *maker* age-set will take part in the festivities, together with their wives, while members of the other age-sets, *e.g.*, the *Dangwegn*, will have their own fun in a neighbouring homestead with their wives. Younger people will not go near these festivities of their elders because they might see the genitals of their mothers and aunts. All those who have married daughters of the men who are sporting themselves will also give the festivities a wide berth lest they should see the nakedness of their mothers-in-law. This dance is called *bul ruathni* or *bul ruath dhiil*. They say that they make this horseplay because they are glad that their child has become a man.

After the cutting, which is called *gar*, the boys are shut up in a hut. This is not built for the purpose but is temporarily vacated by the women of the family in whose homestead the operation has taken place.

Between the cutting and the ceremonial exit from the period of convalescence the boys are known as *ok*. The boys suffer excruciating pain during the first two days or so after the operation and nothing can be done to relieve their agony. These first few days are recognised as being a time of great danger for the boys since the wounds may break open again and great loss of blood ensue. Youths and girls are prohibited from visiting the boys during this period since they are likely to be sexually unclean. Especially are pregnant women kept away from the vicinity

11:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1945
FJ22 Nuer FJ 22

have been paid in compensation for adultery with the wife of Yang". The same verb is used for paying compensation for intercourse with an unmarried girl e.g. one says *Bi yang ruak*, "You will pay a cow" for this action. *Ruak* also means to legitimatize a child born of an unmarried concubine. The genitor says *Ca gatda ruk*, "I have legitimatised my child by payment of a fee".

To describe sexual relations outside the union of marriage Nuer use the verb *lum*. The use of this word is a polite way of referring to sexual intercourse and could also be used to describe marital relations if one were to refer to intercourse between husband and wife. But it would be very unusual to refer to it. The word *lum* is used to describe the social relationship of a man to an unmarried concubine or widow-concubine, though it is a slightly coarse expression when used in this connection, and in the presence of related persons one would preferably say of a man and a widow *Mathke pi kel*, "They drink water together". *Lum* is also used to describe the courtship of a girl by a youth and refers to mere flirting or sexual intercourse alike. In fact it covers all relations between the sexes from casual intercourse to permanent cohabitation, though it has generally the sense of extramarital relations.

The rules of exogamy which obtain for simple legal marriage apply also to all the different unions described in this paper. A man may not cohabit with a woman whom he may not marry.

VI

The test of the nature of a procreative union is in the division of the bride-cattle of daughters born of it. When the pater is alive he receives the "cattle of the father" and "the cattle of the mother". If he is dead they belong to his sons (the bride's half and full brothers). The genitor in ghost-marriage and leviritic marriage has no legal claim to the "cattle of the father" or the "cattle of the mother". They belong, at any rate in theory, to the bride's brothers. The genitor in ghost-marriage stands in the place of the pater with regard to the bride's brothers as well as to the bride herself so that there is no need to define ownership of the bride cattle very clearly, for in any case they join his herd. When the genitor has begotten the bride in leviritic concubinage, division of the cattle may be more complicated because the bride may have full or half brothers begotten by her dead pater, or by other men after his death. I discuss these matters in a preliminary manner here because they will be elaborated later.

The genitor in ghost-marriage and in leviritic marriage may always demand a cow for his services for having begotten the bride. Similarly a man who lives with a widow-concubine may demand a cow on the marriage of her daughter on the grounds that he has begotten her and, if he acted as her foster-father, he may claim another two or three head of cattle for having acted as bread-winner to the family during her infancy and adolescence. He says "I cut meat for them" in reference to the fact the children have been nurtured by his labour as herdsman, gardener, and hunter.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

in the home of his parents-in-law they avoid offering him milk from the cattle he has paid them. Further, if there is a divorce and the bridewealth cattle are returned to the husband's people they sacrifice a goat before they drink of their milk.

Nuer 'respect with regard to food' unrelated people (*nei ti gwagh*) of the opposite sex, especially if they are unmarried and possible sweethearts. They will not eat with them or even see them, or be seen by them, eating and drinking, and food must not be mentioned when they are both present. The sexes, unless they are kin, avoid each other in the matter of food. Nuer feel so strongly about this avoidance that I was obliged to observe it strictly myself.

Another situation in reference to which one hears the word *thek* is homicide. I discuss it in greater detail in Chapter XII. A man who slays another respects water—he may not drink—until a priest has made sacrifice and cut his right arm. Then until the blood-feud is closed by payment of cattle and by sacrifices the kin of the slayer and the kin of the slain may not eat or drink from vessels from which the other has eaten or drunk. They respect the vessels and the food and water of the other party. Even to use the same vessels at the home of a third party who is in no way connected with the feud may entail the most serious consequences. A third party may cause death to one side or the other by eating or drinking with both.

Another use of the word *thek*, which, as always, contains the idea of avoidance, is in reference to burial and to mortuary sacrifices. Those who bury a corpse respect water—they may not drink—until they have been cleansed. Members of a dead man's age-set abstain from the meat of the cattle sacrificed at the ceremony held to close the period of mourning for him. They are said to respect the meat. It has been noted earlier (p. 55) that people may not eat or drink in the homes of close kin of a person struck by lightning before they have sacrificed. Another use is in connexion with the eldest child of a marriage. He respects the spoons of his parents and the sleeping-hide of his mother. He is careful not to eat with the first or sit on the second. Were he to do so he might cause the mother to be barren and injure the father, himself, and the cattle. A man is also said to respect his as yet unconceived children by abstaining from congress with his wife when she is menstruating[1]

[1] He is not said to *thek*, respect, his wife when she is menstruating. He

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer F I22

196 784 [834] [841] [234] and while she is suckling an infant, for a child born of union in these forbidden periods is a child of misfortune. A woman in her periods respects the milk of cows; she may only drink goat's milk at this time. Nuer also use the word *thek* to refer to the prohibition on men milking cows. Men respect the cows with regard to milking. Milking is done only by women and boys. It can happen, however, that on journeys there are no women or boys present, and in these circumstances men may milk the cows on condition that each gets another to milk his cows for him. I learnt in 1936 that a youth, Tot, who in 1931 had been a member of my household, had died as a result of having milked a cow at night in the byre of his home and drunk the milk.

196 776 784 One of the commonest uses of *thek* is, as we have seen, in reference to totems. A man respects his totem by refraining from harming it in any way (pp. 64 seq.). The respect is mutual and the totem should refrain from harming those who respect it. We have also noted earlier (p. 129) the respect relationship between twins and birds. The word is also used for the attitude of a man towards his fetish.

196 784 *Thek* has, therefore, in all its contexts of usage a sense of deference, constraint, modesty or shyness, or a mixture of these attitudes. It seems often to carry as part of its load of meaning a feeling of embarrassment which is entirely lacking in the ordinary behaviour of Nuer towards persons and nature. The behaviour associated with it is formalistic and includes always avoidance and abstention, though it will have been observed that these need not be absolute. A man does not in any way avoid his cows except with regard to (*ke kwi*) milking them.[1]

The purpose and function of these respect relationships are

observes or honours (*luth*) the days of her indisposition. On the other hand, *thek* may be used to speak of a woman being in her periods, it being understood that what she respects are the cattle. The word can thus be used as a polite euphemism for 'to menstruate'.

[1] While a man does not respect a cow dedicated to a spirit, Dr. Smith tells me that he can be said to respect it with regard to milk and marriage. Only members of his family may drink its milk and it must not be used for marriage, unless in either case the spirit gives its consent. Dr. Lienhardt tells me that a man can also be said to respect such a cow with regard to urine, in that he does not use it for domestic purposes. As I was not aware of these particular usages of the word *thek* I can only record this information without discussing it. A breach of the prohibitions would certainly involve liability (pp. 39–40) but it would not be classed as *nueer*.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

not drink their milk and that should he even tread on their dung he might cause grave injury either to himself or to his cattle. Likewise, a man will not accept as bridewealth for his daughter cattle paid to her husband in compensation for adultery she has committed. This is a shocking idea to Nuer, who say that it is like incest. 837 783

The pollution may spread (*dop*) beyond those directly concerned in it. The adulterer, the husband, and the wife are dangerous to anyone they come into contact with who has an open sore, for the *kor* may enter him through it. One day at a wedding a youth was trying to reconcile his desire to watch the dancing with the need to hide an open wound from the eyes of those who might cause it to fester, by watching the dance from the shelter of maize plants. I heard his mother shout to him in reprimand 'there you stand in the maize where people can see you. Is *ther* (p. 176) a good thing, and is *kor* a good thing, that you thus expose yourself?' It is largely from fear lest an adulterer or adulteress or cuckold might see them that lads are so closely secluded while they still have open wounds on their foreheads after initiation. Adultery may also cause a wife who has been partner to it to suffer in childbirth, and if she finds the pains of labour grievous she will make known to the midwife any adulterous acts she may have committed. The sin and its consequences become less by being confessed. 837 783 753

Another dangerous influence is that brought about by a man having congress with his wife while she is nursing a child. Responsibility rests with the husband, 'for this is an affair of men, and it is not a woman's business to deny her husband access'. As has been noted, this is an offence that comes within the category of *nueer*, but the specific name for it is *thiang*. This word denotes the act itself, the consequences which follow from it, and the rite performed to ward off the consequences. Since children are not weaned till they are about three years old it might be thought that husbands must often give way to temptation, but one seldom hears of a wife becoming pregnant before her child at the breast is weaned, and Nuer themselves say that it is uncommon. I cannot say whether a husband who commits the offence would generally perform the prescribed rites unless the pregnancy of his wife made it common knowledge. In the only cases I have come across action was taken when it became evident that a nursing mother was pregnant. I was told that it was then taken to ward off the 783 834

783 serious danger of dysentery, perhaps causing death, her condition
834 threatens to the child she is suckling. The infant is laid at the side of a small termite mound, and a person who respects *thiang*—in this sense the sickness which results from a breach of the interdiction—circles a handful of burning grass over it, and also holds the child over the flame.[1] A dog is then brought and the child is placed on its back. They cut a piece off the dog's ear and it is released and runs off 'taking the *thiang* with it'. Finally a goat is sacrificed and a piece cut from one of its ears is tied with the piece of the dog's ear round the child's neck. Nuer say that in this way the dangerous influence of the abnormality (*buom*) is wiped out (*woc*). The rite is performed by old women, though it is a man who sacrifices the goat. The old women eat the sacrificial meat. On the occasion on which I witnessed it all the older women of the cattle camp ran, shouting, out of the camp, each carrying a child which she placed on a small termite mound so that, I was told, the *thiang* might go into the mound. All the small children of the camp were treated in this way because the husband whose conduct had brought about the situation had eaten and drunk from the same vessels as others in the camp, and had smoked tobacco from the same pipes as they, so that the *thiang* might have spread (*dop*) to the other families in it and endangered all the infants of the community. At the end of the rite the husband and wife wash in a stream to cleanse themselves from their uncleanness. A child born in these circumstances is regarded as dangerous (p. 176).

II

783 In using the word 'sin' to refer to the ideas I have been discussing we have to be more than usually on guard against thinking into Nuer thought what may be in our own and is alien to theirs. From our point of view the ethical content of what the Nuer regard as grave faults may appear to be highly variable, and even altogether absent. A fault of inadvertence, though it may not

[1] Both the word *thiang* and the rite I describe have probably been taken over from the Dinka. I cannot prove that this is the case but it is strongly suggested by this totemistic relationship some people have to the sickness caused by a breach of the prohibition (p. 77). Dr. Mary Smith, who kindly inquired into the matter on my behalf, tells me that the Nuer at her mission say that the word is a Dinka one.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

THE SACRIFICIAL ROLE OF CATTLE

231 731 261 The very special circumstances in which cattle are killed for food are times of severe famine and in what are called *nak*, or in some parts of Nuerland *kanar* or *cuel*, camps. Within my own short experience, in 1931, a year of great hunger, the Lou Nuer killed many oxen for food, and during a famine in western Nuerland in 1935 a great number of beasts were slaughtered to keep the people alive. Dr. Howell says that in the Zeraf valley in 1943, likewise a year of famine, animals were being killed for food.[1] The Lou Nuer even have a reputation, of which they are ashamed, for killing oxen when hungry, for not waiting, that is, till faced with starvation. How often this situation used to occur is not, and cannot, be known. If it is not altogether a modern phenomenon, we may suppose that it was much less likely to have arisen before rinderpest depleted the herds and imposed peace prevented their rehabilitation through raiding, the milk supply thus being lessened.[2] *Nak* camps are presumably so called because they are 231 881 formed for the express purpose of killing (*nak*) oxen. They are formed in some years only, in the rains or at the commencement of the dry season, by youths, each of whom takes an ox to the camp where one by one they are slaughtered and the young men gorge themselves on their flesh. Now that cattle have become scarcer two youths may share a single animal, though it is still thought that there ought to be an ox to a man. There is some doubt about the precise significance of this custom. When I published an account of the Nuer age-set system[3] I considered that it did not form an integral part of the rites of initiation but was only incidentally connected with them. I may have been wrong in this conclusion, and my own later researches revealed features which incline me to accept Dr. Howell's contention that they are connected with the age-set system.[4] Certainly there is more in the *nak* than merely killing oxen for feasting. That it has a ritual significance is clear from the fact that the youths who take part in it are segregated. Girls are not allowed to enter, or at any rate to sleep [834] in, the camps. Abstinence is imposed at a time when the company of girls and their favours are a Nuer's chief interest. Nor may the

[1] P. P. Howell, 'The Age-Set System and the Institution of "*Nak*" among the Nuer' (with a Note by E. E. Evans-Pritchard), *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1948, p. 180. I was told that on raids on the Dinka pillaged oxen were slaughtered for food.

[2] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, pp. 19–20.

[3] 'The Nuer: Age-Sets', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1936.

[4] P. P. Howell, ibid.